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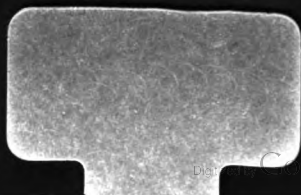
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A CHILD
OF
THE SACRED HEART.

Fitzgerald (Mary)



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Child of the Sacred Heart.

THE first number of "Our Lady's Little Books," published some years ago, contained the life of Elizabeth Twiddy, a young girl of no ordinary virtue, who in a humble station of life carried on a successful apostolate amongst her neighbours and friends. In the new series of these little publications, placed under the special patronage of our Blessed Lady's name, we offer to our readers another instance of holiness in our own days, in an obscure though honourable position of life.

There must be several persons in London who remember Mary Fitzgerald, one of the teachers of the Poor School in Great Peter Street, Westminster, in the year

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1859. At first sight there was nothing prepossessing in her looks: a habit of stooping, a slouching gait, a more than ordinary neglect of dress, marked her appearance. But those who became well acquainted with her soon perceived in this young girl indications of thoughtfulness, intelligence, strength of purpose, and originality of character. Her soft brown eyes, her expressive mouth, her slow smile and ready response when anything which interested her was mentioned, betokened both power of mind and depth of feeling.

Like Elizabeth Twiddy, Mary Fitzgerald led a life of strict poverty, loved God ardently, served Him devotedly, and died at an early age. There the resemblance ceases. Elizabeth was brought up a Catholic; Mary was a convert. Elizabeth had no knowledge save the science of the saints, and her parents belonged to the

humblest ranks of society. Mary was well informed and well born, though her family had become reduced in circumstances. Elizabeth's soul seems to have been one of those in which a naturally amiable disposition and the early influences of grace combine to make virtue as it were easy. No doubt even in such favoured souls interior conflicts will often arise, and struggles take place, without which perfection cannot be attained ; but the habit of self-conquest acquired in childhood, and continually increasing as life goes on, smooths the way for the daily recurring triumphs of grace over nature, and makes them advance in holiness with comparative facility. Mary Fitzgerald had, on the contrary, a naturally proud and stubborn character, one which nothing but grace could master, and which grace itself only mastered at the cost of

many a painful contest. The peculiarities of her first religious impressions tended also to foster a spirit of independence and hard self-reliance. It was due to the Catholic religion, in all its strength and sincerity, that she became what the closing pages of this little book will show her to have been.

Some feel more sympathy with the first of these two descriptions of character and of sanctity, and some with the last. Even in canonized saints we can detect their different influence and effects; both are beautiful, both teach holy lessons. There is something very touching and admirable in the early surrender of a soul to God, and, as it appears to us, the sinless course of a perfectly consistent life; but it is also a noble and blessed sight, that of grace struggling with and finally triumphing over passion and pride, and turning by its divine

influence into the highest virtues natural qualities which unrestrained make fearful havoc in a soul.

Mary Fitzgerald was born in London in the month of January, 1837. Her father, an Irish gentleman, who had become involved in pecuniary difficulties, died when she was only four years of age, leaving his wife and two little girls in very straitened circumstances. Soon after his death, Mary, the eldest of these children, went to live with her guardian, and remained in his house till she was fourteen years old. Almost from her infancy, and whilst still under her mother's care, she gave tokens of that great love for the poor which marked her subsequent life. Before she could speak plainly she used to entreat that her own shoes and stockings might be given to the ragged, barefooted little children in the street. The sight of shivering, wretched

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creatures made her cry bitterly. She had taken particular notice of those words of the Bible, "He who gives to the poor lends to the Lord," and they remained ever impressed on her mind. One day that she was walking with an elderly lady whom she called grandmama, an old woman begged of them. Mary instantly advocated her cause, and begged the hardest of the two. She would not stir from the spot or let her grandmama move on till she had complied with her request. In vain the good lady pleaded that she had no coppers about her. "Never mind, grandmama; sixpence will do," Mary urged, and so resolutely that she ended by carrying her point. Though as she grew older pride became her besetting sin, it never displayed itself towards the poor, for whom she seems to have had an instinctive reverence. Sometimes she kissed poor women in the streets from

sheer love of poverty. No one who knew her could suppose she did this to show off humility, for display or affectation of any kind was utterly foreign to her character: these acts were simply the result of her practical belief in the words of the Gospel. Pretension or arrogance in others was apt to make her feel and behave proudly. If unjustly accused, nothing would induce her to beg pardon. She preferred suffering to humiliation. Her character was simple and truthful, and when thoroughly trained in the school of religious discipline, these natural qualities allied themselves with that sincere humility which is essential truth, and that holy forgetfulness of self which becomes the highest form of simplicity. Up to the year 1851 she was brought up in what may be called old-fashioned Protestantism, a respectable sort of religion, marked by indifference as to doctrines,

opposition to enthusiasm, and aversion to what it terms extremes. The strange transport of animosity which convulsed the whole of England that year, in consequence of the so-called Papal aggression, first turned Mary's mind to subjects of controversy. She began to evince leanings towards High Church opinions, Puseyite practices, and even Catholicism, which alarmed her guardian, who looked on the Pope as Anti-christ, and therefore on all approximation to Romanism as a dangerous delusion. In order to put a stop at once to such vagaries, he resolved to send his ward to Scotland. She was placed at a school where she was to complete her education and receive instruction in return for her services as a pupil teacher. Mary went through much suffering during the years she spent in this place. It was only after she had left it that her relatives learnt what she had endured.

Religion became about this time the habitual subject of her thoughts, and, as was to be expected at her age, the religious belief of those with whom she lived influenced her own. She determined to serve God at all costs, and set about it with the first fervours of an ardent disposition, adopting the most rigid Presbyterian tenets, and believing herself to be a determined Protestant. When she was seventeen years old she entered as a governess the family of an influential manufacturer in Stirling, where she met with great kindness and was treated as a friend. This gentleman was a leading member of the Calvinist section of the Kirk of Scotland, and his house the frequent resort of the most talented preachers and most zealous divines of that school. Mary tried her utmost to become a thorough Calvinist; but the more she

tried to persuade herself of the truth of those doctrines the more restless and miserable she became. Night after night was spent in bitter tears, and in vain endeavours to arrive at that assurance of salvation which she was taught to consider as the only evidence of election. Meanwhile she incessantly studied the Bible, prayed a great deal, and spent some of her time in walking about the town and its neighbourhood distributing tracts or pasting on the walls advertisements of sermons or of the approaching arrival of some celebrated preacher. On one occasion she was staying in the same house with an English lay preacher of the so-called Free Gospel. This gentleman, who appears to have been a person of sincere piety as far as his light went, took an interest in the enthusiastic young girl, conversed and prayed with her, and gave her a book,

which she kept for some time after she became a Catholic. As a sacrifice to duty, she ended by parting with it on account of the heresies it contained, but she always retained a grateful remembrance of this stranger's efforts to benefit her soul. The words he addressed to her confirmed and strengthened her resolution to devote herself entirely to God, and in return she never ceased to pray for his conversion to the true Church when she had once herself found her way to it.

Proud and high-spirited as Mary was at that time, she was always ready to perform the meanest offices, if a religious idea was connected with them. If permitted to do so, she would gladly have scrubbed the floor of the meeting-house, and often wandered hours together in the pouring rain and mud to collect people and bring them to the services. Singing hymns was

her chief delight ; but all this while there was no real peace or joy in her soul. A yearning which nothing satisfied seemed to torment her. Her sufferings were often intense, for when oppressed with gloom and misery, she ascribed all her wretchedness to a want of faith, and this was of all pangs the most grievous to her. She was always addressing to God a prayer, the meaning of which she did not then fully understand, though later it was given to her to do so : " My God," she kept saying, " let me have Christ once in my heart, if it be only for a moment."

During a visit Mary made to the Highlands she attended camp meetings, which powerfully impressed her mind. The wild scenery amidst which these religious gatherings took place struck her imagination, and the enthusiasm displayed in them affected her feelings. She could not speak

without emotion of these scenes and of the thoughts which they had awakened in her mind. A kind of retreat used to take place before the day appointed for the general reception of the Lord's Supper. All the members of the congregation had to appear before the elders, to receive their ticket of admission, which was either a card or a sort of medal. Those who had given public scandal were obliged to make a confession of it and some kind of public atonement before they received their ticket. On the day of celebration, after long prayers, sermons, and hymns, a table was set out. The elders used to receive first, and afterwards all the other members of the congregation, sitting down in turns and passing to each other the bread and the cup of wine. This ceremony was preceded by an absolute fast of twenty-four hours. All this Mary entered into with

her whole heart and soul. The pastor of these simple people was a very old man, for whom she had an intense admiration, which extended even to a brown wig he wore, and which she used to speak of with veneration. His knowledge of the Bible was very great, by her account, and it was her delight to come to him in the evening, when her pupils had retired to rest, and, sitting at his feet, to listen to his explanations of the Gospel. So great was her enthusiasm for the piety and the teachings of this aged minister that she would have wished to remain in that spot and spend her life in waiting on him and listening to his instructions. She continued for some time afterwards to correspond with a young lady in Holland, whom she had met at that place, and to whom she gave the name of "Sister." The letters which passed between them were in a high-flown poetical

style, full of religious theories, but very little practical. She used also to hear occasionally from some of the married women of the congregation; but their letters were less sentimental, and dwelt chiefly on domestic details.

As time went on, her spiritual troubles only increased. She could not find that she had the sort of faith which she was told was necessary to salvation. She had nothing to offer to God, and this continually preyed on her mind. At last she bethought herself (a very uncalvinistic idea) of supplying by some active work for her deficiencies in matters of faith. She resolved to become a missionary, and to go and convert the Indians. She found some little comfort in this project, and hastened to impart it to a friend, the wife of a clergyman in Stirling. This lady told her that her desire to save the souls of the

Indians was very praiseworthy, but suggested that she had possibly a more urgent duty to fulfil at home—viz., the conversion of her own mother, who had married a Roman Catholic, and in consequence embraced that false religion. This remark struck a responsive chord in Mary's heart, for she was fondly attached to her mother. It decided her at once to go to London, but still with the view of ultimately pursuing her missionary scheme.

On the day when she set out on her journey southward, she herself related to the writer of this narrative that a young girl, a great friend of hers, walked with her part of the way to the place she was to start from. When the moment of separation had arrived, they sat down on a bank on the roadside, and taking their Bibles out of their pockets, they opened them at haphazard, leaving it to chance to assign

to each of them a text which would serve as a memorial of that parting hour. The words which fell to Mary's lot were these : "Thou shalt no longer be called the forsaken one." She loved to dwell upon them in after-years.



CHAPTER II.

MARY'S mother and her stepfather, Mr. L——, a French painter residing in London, welcomed her most affectionately to their home. The bigoted little Presbyterian, who arrived at the station with a long face, a solemn countenance, a small box of clothes, and an immense parcel of tracts, was received by Mr. L——, a sincere and devoted Roman Catholic, with as much tenderness as if she had been his own daughter. Mary confidently expected to effect the conversion of her relatives, and lost no time in setting about her object. She evidently thought the most effectual way of bringing about her mother's return to Protestantism would be to begin by converting her husband, and accordingly, with characteristic earnestness, she had not

been half an hour in the house before she opened her batteries. Her honesty of purpose, her heartfelt zeal, her persevering energy, were all directed to this end. Instead of resenting this onset, her step-father, with true charity, and French good humour, met it in the most conciliatory manner possible, and took every opportunity of conversing with her in a friendly manner about religion, and of inducing her to read Catholic books and attend Catholic services. He offered no obstacle to her favourite devotion—the distribution of tracts. Her room was literally crammed with them. On one occasion, when she had left the window open on a windy day, the draught from the sudden opening of the door created a hurricane which sent them flying into the streets, to the secret satisfaction of the Catholic inmates; but she soon procured a fresh supply from Stirling, so

that nothing seemed to rid the house of them. Another time, when she was on her way to visit some Protestant friends, she suddenly missed her bundle, and vainly searched for it in every direction ; with the assistance of her stepfather, who accompanied her, and who could scarcely refrain from smiling at the catastrophe, it was afterwards ascertained that a boy had picked it up and carried it to a butcher's shop. She took comfort in the thought that the tracts might perhaps make their way with the meat into his customers' houses. Up to the moment when she became a Catholic, and even when under instruction, she still persevered in walking about on Sundays during the hours between the services, distributing tracts, and if on the Sunday after she was received into the Church she could have procured Catholic ones she would

instantly have begun to give them away. There was no pause, no interruption in her work, or what she thought was her work for souls. She toiled and fought for God and religion as a Protestant until the moment when light was given her to do so as a Catholic.

The first service she attended in a Catholic church was that of the Stations of the Cross. It seemed as if ordained by Providence that this beautiful devotion should engage her attention at the very beginning of her acquaintance with Catholic worship. She was greatly touched by it. Her love for our Blessed Lord made everything connected with His Passion dear to her. The hymn "Jesus our love is crucified" immediately became her favourite one, and she used often to ask her parents to sing it with her. She made no difficulty in attending Catholic services or listen-

ing to Catholic sermons, even before she had the least intention of changing her religion. One day not very long after her arrival in London she went into one of the confessionals in Farm Street Church and informed the priest of her desire to become a missionary in India. He of course told her that as long as she was a Protestant he could give her no advice on the subject, but that if she became a Catholic she might come to him and he would help her. Gradually her mind underwent a change. When first in London she thought of nothing but converting others. Not only did she seek to influence her parents, but she entertained great hopes of making a good Protestant of the Rev. Mr. S——, one of the priests of Kentish Town, who was a frequent visitor at their house. But soon she began to find that the answers she received both from him and from her

stepfather, when she brought forward the common Protestant attacks on Catholicism, produced an effect on her own mind which she had not anticipated, and placed matters before her quite in a new light. As she was perfectly honest and sincere, it never happened to her to dispute for argument's sake. As soon as any of her objections were answered, or her assertions satisfactorily disproved, she readily yielded the point, and her truthfulness caused her at once to acknowledge the mistakes she had made.

Her parents always noticed that her controversial ardour increased after her visits to some Protestant friends, who did all in their power to counteract by their influence and their kindness the effect which an increasing acquaintance with the Catholic religion was producing upon her. She sometimes brought home with her

controversial books and left them in the parlour. No notice being taken of them, she one day complained to her stepfather that he expected her to read his books and that he would not read hers. His answer was that the manifest untruthfulness of those publications would alone prevent him from perusing them. Amongst many other instances, he showed her a passage in which it was stated that *an indulgence* was a permission to commit sin, purchased by a sum of money, and appealed to her better knowledge as to the falsehood of that assertion. She was forced to admit the charge. She asked him one day if Catholics believed in miracles, and on receiving an affirmative answer she put on a look of commiseration. "Do you not believe in them?" Mr. L—— asked her. She uttered a most emphatic *No*. "If you read your Stirling tracts attentively," he

rejoined, "you would find that Protestants believe in them as well as we do. It is stated in one of them that a ship was on the Niagara, and for some reason or other going straight into the Falls. It seemed as if nothing could save it. But a Protestant bishop on board knelt down and said a prayer, upon which the ship suddenly turned round and went ashore as quietly as possible. This, if true, is as great a miracle as we should call upon you to believe."

Every conversation about religion in those days seemed to sadden Mary. She had been so confident of the truth of her own opinions, so sanguine in the hope of winning over to Protestantism those she loved, and now the ground seemed to fail under her feet. The anguish which none but those who have gone through it themselves can justly estimate had set in—the struggle

between long-cherished prejudices and a dawning belief in a new faith. Her countenance wore a deeply melancholy expression. The process of conversion cost her many a bitter pang. She was often overheard when alone sobbing and praying aloud that Almighty God would open her eyes and show her the truth. Her mother sometimes found her in the morning lying dressed on her bed, on which she had not rested through the night, her hair wet with tears and her face pale and dejected. It seemed to her at that time as if she must be converted to the faith of her parents or else prevail on them to adopt hers, and the struggle either way seemed beyond her strength. Meanwhile her friends in Scotland had notice of what they called her danger. She had gone one day with her parents to the French Chapel, and there heard a sermon preached by Father

Gonin, now Archbishop of Trinidad.* She was greatly edified and delighted with this discourse, the subject of which was Catholic devotion, and with much simplicity expressed this feeling in a letter to Stirling, which caused the greatest uneasiness to her friends. They wrote to her to come back to them immediately, for that she was in a most perilous state, and had acted with great imprudence in going to hear the sermons of that French monk. Mary answered that she had now seen and known enough of the Catholic religion to make her feel it an imperative duty to examine further into the subject, and that if Mr. — would allow her to see the Catholic priest at Stirling she would return there at once; but as he might not wish to receive her on those

* Mary was well acquainted with both French and German.

terms, she would in that case of course release him from his engagement. She begged for an immediate answer, as every hour of delay in the prosecution of so important an inquiry was irksome to her. A considerable time elapsed before she received a reply to her letter. Meanwhile she began to receive instructions from the Rev. Mr. S——, the priest she had once hoped to convert. At last an answer came from Stirling to the effect that she was to return there on her own conditions. She was at first delighted at this. With youthful confidence and impetuosity she now thought that she would induce Mr.—— and all his family, to whom she was fondly attached, to become Catholics. She was herself by this time on the point of being received into the Church. But her stepfather earnestly remonstrated with her, pointing out how im-

prudent it would be in her imperfectly instructed state, and not yet fortified by the grace of the Sacraments, to throw herself among influences directly adverse to the faith which God had awakened in her soul ; also how little competent she was to teach others, and that by the inconsiderate rashness of such conduct she might, whilst seeking to benefit her friends, lose herself the spiritual blessings she was about to receive. He reminded her that she had stipulated for an immediate answer to her letter, and that the long delay which had intervened before she received one had virtually released her from her engagement, for she was no longer in the same position as at the time when she had offered to return to Stirling. It cost Mary a great struggle to follow this advice. The ardent desire which at every period of life and under all changes of cir-

cumstances possessed her to impart to those she loved the truths she herself believed in, and to lead them where she thought they would be nearer to God, made it a real sacrifice to her to give up the opportunity of placing before those cherished friends her new convictions, but at last she made up her mind to it, and wrote to give up her situation in Mr. ——'s family. This was the decisive crisis in her life. From that time forward she began to feel happy. A peace and joy she had never known filled her heart. To an earnest, ardent soul like hers the Catholic religion offered daily increasing blessings never dreamed of before. To use a common comparison, it was like placing a fish in water. She had found the proper element she had so long been craving for ; her yearnings, her restless aspirations had attained their fulfilment. She began to drink at that foun-

tain which miraculously excites spiritual thirst and at the same time allays it. The doctrines, the practices, the services of the Church presented continual new sources of interest and delight to her ardent soul. The mysterious prayer put up in past years that Christ might dwell in her heart, if it were but for one moment, had now its ample accomplishment. The devotion to the Blessed Sacrament and to the Sacred Heart of Jesus answered all her spiritual needs. She was received into the Church in the octave of Corpus Christi of the year 1858. From that moment she began to make it her habit to go from church to church, wherever the Blessed Sacrament was exposed or Benediction given. She devoutly picked up the leaves and flowers over which the Blessed Sacrament had passed, and brought them home with an innocent joy. Her eyes used to sparkle

when she described the ceremonies of the Church, and the lives and histories of the saints set her heart on fire with the love of God.

A few weeks after Mary's reception into the Church the writer of this memoir became acquainted with her, and personal recollections mingle with the continuation of the narrative.



CHAPTER III.

SOON after Mary Fitzgerald's reception into the Church she began to seek for some employment which would enable her to support herself, and with that object she was introduced by one of the Fathers of Farm Street Church to two or three ladies of the congregation. An engagement as teacher to a newly-founded school in Scotland was in question at one moment, but for some reason or other this did not come to pass. She went to see a lady who wanted a governess for her little boys, but neither did this negotiation succeed, and, as the London season soon came to an end, and the ladies to whom she had been recommended left town, she accepted a temporary engagement as assistant teacher in the Schools of Compassion in

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Drury Lane, directed at that time by a congregation originally French, and which has since become incorporated with the ancient order of the Servites. There she underwent a severe ordeal from the shock which some of her cherished prejudices received, and the training her proud and unbending character had to sustain. She had become a Catholic, and a very fervent one, but had brought with her into the Church fixed ideas as to certain observances which she would insist on considering as commandments—rigid views, for instance, as to the manner of spending the Lord's day; a readiness to take scandal at what she thought was levity in others; and a disposition to criticise severely the failings and shortcomings of her neighbours. She was fond of the Sisters, especially of Sister P——, but the ease of their manners, their light-hearted gaiety, and the way in which they

joked and smiled about things which she had been used to mention with a somewhat Pharisaical solemnity of countenance, shocked her very much. Her natural character and the habits of mind she had acquired made her very averse to yield to others or to surrender on any point her own judgment. When she saw the girls whom the nuns assembled in their house on Sundays to keep them out of mischief, and secure the performance of their religious duties, allowed, and actually encouraged to play—nay, to dance about the room—her indignation knew no bounds. Probably the French manners of these good Sisters were more startling to her than would have been those of an English community. They acted, too, on the principle of St. Philip Neri, to give young people every liberty except that of sinning, and Mary's feelings were terribly upset by their

apparent laxity. She, no doubt, really suffered very much from the struggle caused by what seemed to her conscientious scruples; and, on one occasion, when she had been good-humouredly compelled to join in these Sunday amusements, she went through what felt like real remorse. There appeared at that moment to be some danger of her faith being shaken, but she was too truly a Catholic and too deeply devoted to our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament for this to have been really the case. The recourse she then had to an experienced director, who undertook from that time the spiritual care of that stubborn but ardent and generous soul until it was safely harboured in the religious life, precluded any dangerous results from these temporary struggles. Towards the close of the autumn of that year, after having taught for about three months at the Schools of Compassion,

Mary was engaged as a sub-teacher at the Poor Schools in Great Peter Street, Westminster, and employed at the same time in the night-school of the Warwick Street parish. Then began the life of arduous labour, only diversified by prayer, which she led from the beginning of November, 1858, to the 13th of July, 1859. Not content with her daily and evening duties at the two above-mentioned schools, she contrived to find time to visit poor people and perform various acts of charity. Her only idea of rest was prayer; she united to an extraordinary degree, a thirst for labour in God's service with an intense devotion to His Presence in the Tabernacle. She proposed, that winter, to a lady in the Warwick Street parish, to hold a class for girls on Sundays in the school-room. With the consent of the Hon. and Rev. Dr. Talbot, who was then the director of that school,

and the assistance of some other young persons, this was carried into effect.

It was on those Sunday afternoons that Mary's remarkable talent for giving instruction was noticed by some of those who overheard her teaching her class. When she opened her little Bible, every portion of which she was intimately acquainted with, and, her face glowing with fervour, related and commented on the Scriptural narrative, or explained our Lord's words, the attention of those around her was riveted. She did not like to be listened to except by children and poor people, but sometimes in conversation it was possible to lead her to talk on these subjects, and then she used to forget everything except her own deep interest in them. There was a beauty in her language, an originality in her ideas, and an expression in her countenance on these occasions,

particularly when she spoke of the Blessed Sacrament and the Sacred Heart of Jesus, which those who were intimately acquainted with her can never forget.

She worked at that time with a total disregard of her health, which even then began to show tokens of delicacy, and, not yet understanding the Catholic principle that obedience is better than sacrifice, or rather that it is the highest kind of sacrifice, she would not be restrained, even by her director's command, from leading a life which seriously injured her constitution. If she did not positively disobey, she contrived to elude his orders. For instance, he had enjoined her to eat meat at least three times a week. A friend of hers discovered that the way she fulfilled this injunction was by purchasing once a week a very small sausage, cutting it into three portions, and eating one of them on

each of the appointed days. She would never have a fire in her little room, in which she spent part of the night in prayer. Her clothing was insufficient to keep out the cold, and, all the care of relatives and friends on this point was ineffectual, for what was provided for her own comfort she instantly gave away to the poor. She used bitterly to lament at that time her proneness to outbursts of pride and irritability, which with more or less reason she accused herself of, and on this account would have desired to practise the most severe penances.

In the spring she was compelled, in consequence of her health, which nearly broke down under the double labour, to give up the teaching at the night-school. This afforded her more time for prayer. Sometimes when the church in Farm Street was open in the evening for confessions, she

would remain absorbed in devotion till the last person had gone away, and used to complain that she was driven out of the church and ordered to go to bed when she would have fain passed the whole night in prayer. Her greatest delight was to be allowed to assist the sacristan in arranging the flowers for the altar. She envied the good old woman who swept and cleaned the church, and would have gladly bargained to take her place for life. The following account of her was written by a young friend, who, after being a teacher in the Warwick Street Schools, became a Sister of Mercy. It is given in her own words :—

“I became acquainted with Miss Fitzgerald in the beginning of Lent, 1859. She was then teaching the night-school belonging to the Warwick Street mission. The weather was bitterly cold, and

I noticed how poor and thin her clothes were, and that she wore no shoes, only a pair of old goloshes, which gaped at the sides and showed her thin white stockings, wet with her walk through the snow. I wanted her to leave the cold school-room as soon as possible, for the fire had accidentally gone out, and asked her to come and dry her feet at my fire. She thanked me very sweetly and said she was quite used to getting wet, but that she was so strong it never did her any harm. She seemed ashamed of my noticing her goloshes, and said that she had good boots, but that she had lent them for a day or two to a poor person. I asked her if I might help her as long as she taught the night-school. She consented, and from that time we became close friends. I admired her more than I can express, and was never happy without her. I never

passed a day without trying to see her, but after she gave up the night-school I had hard work to get her to spare time for me. She spent all her leisure moments in Farm Street Church, which she called her home. Every afternoon at four o'clock I used to hurry there lest she should have left before I reached it, and gone to Benediction at some other church. After a day's hard teaching, her rest was always an hour's prayer. She persevered in a most severe fast through all that Lent, though she was teaching several hours a day. A small canister of prepared chocolate, given to her by a friend, lasted her the whole of Lent. She eat no meat, though the same lady had sent her some preserved meat; but this I saw her give away to a poor man. She rose at five and made an hour's meditation. As soon as her scanty breakfast was finished she went to church, and

heard all the masses that were said until nine o'clock, when she hurried off to her class at Westminster. She carried with her a few biscuits, oftener only a piece of crust broken off the loaf, and this was the only dinner she took, even on Sundays. She spent the whole of the three last days of Holy Week in church, took no food but a few biscuits, and quenched her thirst at a public drinking fountain, an action which cost her a severe struggle, but which, as it was on Good Friday, she united to the humiliations of our Blessed Lord. I never left her during those three happy days until I went home to sleep. Her company served me better than a spiritual retreat.

“No poor person asked an alms of her that she did not immediately relieve them, and this was to me almost miraculous, for I knew that all she had was 10s. a week, and out of that she paid 5s. 6d. for lodgings,

and always gave 6d. at the offertory on Sundays. Yet I never saw her enter a church without dropping a halfpenny into the poor-box. What I chiefly remarked in her character was her ardent desire that good persons should become saints, even beyond her wish for the conversion of sinners. It used to grieve her deeply if she noticed that any one she loved grew negligent, or did not increase their efforts to be good. I observed this on several occasions. Once when I asked her to pray for the conversion of a Protestant she answered, 'Yes, I will; but I wish you would be more anxious and pray more for the improvement of lukewarm Catholics. It is so shocking to see God's own children serving Him coldly.' This idea, in consequence of many conversations with her, took strong possession of my mind, and I began to think that it was

after all a greater charity to pray for conversions within the Church than outside of it. She could not endure the idea of any one trifling with grace or holding back from Almighty God anything He asked of them. She grew quite angry with me for being slow in my preparations to enter religion, and said it was a shameful thing to put God off from day to day, and to take liberties with Him that we could not for shame's sake take with any creature. Her devotion to the Sacred Heart was intense, and, though she liked to hear of other orders in the Church, her face would lighten up if mention was made of the 'Sacré Cœur.' 'I shall die a nun of that order,' she was wont to say; 'indeed I shall, and I shall never be happy till they admit me.'

"She was very well informed, and delighted in such study as was useful to

her in teaching according to the Government system, but she made it a point to introduce as much as possible religious instruction in every gallery lesson. Even the sentences she wrote on the black board to be analyzed and parsed by her class were framed to convey a devotional as well as a grammar lesson.

“She told me in confidence that her disposition was naturally very obstinate,—that it only needed for a person to *order* her to do anything for her to feel immediately her spirit up in arms, and so strong an inclination to resist that she grew quite sick in her efforts to obey. I told her that if she went into religion with such a disposition, not thoroughly tested, and, as far as God’s grace enabled her, cured, she would not persevere. She constantly made a particular examination on this point, and so changed was she, even before she

entered religion, that her friends had to be careful what wishes they expressed in her presence, for if they in any way concerned her, she would immediately act upon them. We were one day dressing up a little altar to the Sacred Heart. I turned out of a vase some dirty ugly artificial flowers, and said in jest they would suit her old black bonnet better than an oratory, and in joke pinned them to the border of the said bonnet. I was horrified next morning to see her quietly walking out of church with the flowers just as I had placed them. She had a great attraction to the austerities of the saints, and practised some so severely that I do not doubt her health became injured in consequence."

These reminiscences indicate what was Mary's great desire—viz., to be received into the order of the Sacred Heart. To work for the conversion of the heathen,

and especially of the Jews, had been a favourite idea of hers, and having met at a friend's house Father Alphonse Ratisbonne, she for a moment turned her thoughts to the congregation of Notre Dame de Sion; but her devotion to the Sacred Heart prevailed, and, moreover, she ascertained that the nuns of that order sometimes go to distant countries and instruct heathen women and children. Finding her two special attractions thus united, she fully resolved to seek admittance into that society, and with this view went and made a retreat at the convent at Roehampton. Nothing could have seemed more unlikely than her succeeding in her desire, for in spite of her real refinement of character and superiority of mind, she had neither the appearance nor the outward qualities which are generally considered requisite for an order which is

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devoted to the education of young persons of high rank and called to exercise influence in the world. Accordingly, at the close of her retreat she was informed that she could not be received as a Choir Sister, upon which she earnestly begged to be admitted as a Lay Sister, and she greatly rejoiced at the prospect of performing menial offices and working hard for the community. Her relatives were naturally averse to this arrangement; her director also objected to it, and the matter remained in abeyance. It happened in the month of June that one of the nuns from the Mother House in Paris came to London on business, and hearing from a person who was acquainted with all the circumstances of the case, of the young girl's ardent devotion to the Sacred Heart and desire to enter the order, she undertook to mention the subject to Madame Barat, the

Mother-General, and soon after her return to Paris she wrote to say that Miss Fitzgerald might come there and be received as a Postulant. Great was Mary's joy. Her parents generously overcame their reluctance to part with her, and gave up their child to God without a murmur.

On the 13th of July she proceeded to Paris. On the eve of her departure she had to make a sacrifice which cost her an effort and a few tears. Some of her friends agreed that she could not present herself at the house of the Rue de Varennes in the clothes which she had persistently worn in London, and which were indeed old and shabby beyond description. Of all possible mortifications the most severe to her was to be arrayed in a somewhat fashionable bonnet and a tolerably good gown and cloak. There seems indeed some evidence in her letters that at the last

moment she discarded the obnoxious bonnet.

During the days she spent in Paris some doubt seems to have arisen as to her vocation to the order of the Sacred Heart. Her absorbing devotion to prayer suggested the idea that she might perhaps be called to be a Carmelite. At least a remark of that kind was made in a letter written to England soon after her arrival. But it was after all decided that she should proceed to the house at Gettes St. Pierre, near Brussels, there to begin her noviciate. In that convent she remained for nearly five years, that is to the end of her life. The sequel proved that she had indeed found her true vocation. The following extracts from her letters in their simple and earnest piety, and the testimony of those who watched her life and her death, will support this assertion and

form a fitting sequel to this little narrative. Mary Fitzgerald worked but a few months in London, yet many have owed to her life-long blessings, and those who knew her well will never forget her. Often her image rises before them in the church she so dearly loved, and which even in the midst of her joy at the fulfilment of her greatest wish it was such a pang to her to leave. May she obtain from the Sacred Heart of Jesus, for all the readers of this little book, grace to love Him as she did.



EXTRACTS *from Mary Fitzgerald's*
Letters to her Family.

My own Dearest Mamma,

Reverend Mother has kindly allowed me to write a few lines to thank you for your very kind letter, and to tell you how happy I am that you agree to what I proposed. I am sure that it will be a great consolation to you to receive our Lord every week and to tell Him all your troubles. In this way we shall not be separated, for although there are miles of earth between our bodies, our souls will be united in Jesus, to whom space is nothing.

I am, thank God, quite well. I had a swelling in the knee some time back, but it is much better now. Dearest mamma, you do not say one word about my little brothers, and I do long to hear how they are getting on. Tell them they must both write to me a little letter

on new year's day. I am so glad to hear of dear Mr. L——'s picture. I have prayed for its success every day since I have heard from you about it, not that he may get honour by it, but that it may, by the blessing of God, be made the means of inspiring many souls with devotion to that great saint, dear St. Joseph. St. Theresa says she never asked him anything on the day of his feast that he did not grant her. How are all your works of charity getting on? We had such a lovely feast the day of St. Stanislaus. It was like a little foretaste of heaven. Dear ——! I prayed that God would give her strength to become one day His spouse. It is such a happiness—such a privilege! You will be so happy too in heaven that you made the sacrifice of your child to God. How gracious of Him to choose us in preference to so many others who are much more deserving—me especially, who have always been so ungrateful and offended Him so much. Pray for your child, who is most unworthy of such great blessings. With kindest best love to all and to yourself, my own dearest mamma, I

am, in the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, your devoted child.

It is indeed a great blessing to be able to pray to our dear Lord, Jesus Christ, in the Blessed Sacrament for an hour or two together without being disturbed ; but if He does not give us the opportunity, we please Him better by faithfully doing our duty and being fully determined not to offend Him by the least venial sin.

I heard a good priest say some time ago that all the saints have had some little prayer which they said many times in the day, such for instance as "O my God, I offer you the Blood of Jesus Christ for the pardon of my sins;" or, "My God, I love you ; make me love you more and more;" or again, "O my Lord, Jesus Christ, I adore you in the Blessed Sacrament ; never let me sin against you." Such little ejaculations were, he told us, like so many arrows darted upwards from our hearts, "and that if we say them frequently during the day, it

helps us not to be distracted at our stated times of prayer and at mass, because our minds are thus more habitually fixed on God."

We had an interesting ceremony on St. John's day: two professions and three clothings. A Jesuit father gave us a beautiful instruction on the words, "The disciple whom Jesus loved." He showed us that God gives a sign of the same sort of predilection for a soul when he calls it to religion. He tried to describe the happiness of the religious life, but all he could say fell far short of the reality, for no one can tell the peace and joy there is in the house of God.

You have the first place in the poor prayers of your child. I love to remember you all by name to our dear Lord. It seems to me since I have entered into religion that I love you all still better than I did before. Kentish Town will always be very very dear to me. Our poor little Church! I shall never forget that it was there I learned the truth. Do ask for me the

true spirit of my vocation, a spirit of obedience, humility, and faith, that I may be a real child of the Church—a true religious of the Sacred Heart.

I followed you all through the day (Christmas Day), my little brothers at Holy Communion, then all of you at High Mass. I united myself to you, and I offered up the sacrifice we make, dearest mamma, of not spending these beautiful feasts together, to obtain to love our dear Jesus a little more, and to persevere by His grace till we arrive safely to the joys of heaven ! We have had also a happy festival. First two masses in the middle of the night and a general communion ; another mass in the morning and exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. A Jesuit Father gave us a beautiful sermon on the spirit of sacrifice. He showed us Jesus sacrificing everything, first in the crib, afterwards at Nazareth, then in His public life, and afterwards on the cross. He showed us the spirit of sacrifice in the Apostles, in the confessors, and in all the faithful members of His Church.

“But why do I choose,” the reverend father said, “to speak of the spirit of sacrifice in preference to all the other virtues which Jesus practised on earth? Because it is the most important, because without it there is no true love. He that loves much sacrifices much.” But I must stop, my dear mamma, or I should write you the whole sermon. It was so very useful; for, after all, it is what we have to put in practice every day, to take up our cross and follow Jesus. We have had a great cross since I last wrote to you. The dear nun of whom I spoke, our Reverend Mother, is no more. It is a great trial above all for our new Reverend Mother, who was like her child. I hope you will pray that our dear Lord may support and console her.

I had occasion the other day to assist at the administration of one of the religious. It was for the first time in my life, and it made a very deep impression on me. I had always had a great fear of being present at such a moment, and it was only by chance I found myself there,

as it was all rather sudden. But what a difference to what I expected! My own dear mamma, if you could only see the deathbed of a religious! So calm—so peaceful! Not a sound when I entered the room. Reverend Mother was at the side of the sick person, saying the prayers for the agonizing and suggesting ejaculations. Then the priest arrived, and, after extreme unction, he gave the plenary indulgence and absolution. The nun, who is very aged and had been long ill, began to get better from that moment, and it is likely that she may yet live a long time. So great is the grace of the Sacrament when received in time. For me it has been a great grace; I feel an increased desire to serve God and have such a death-bed as that.

I am sure that you will all pray for me to the dear little Jesus. It was before His crib that I first learned to love poverty, and if not to love, at any rate to *esteem*, humiliation.

We have been celebrating the feast of the

Patronage of St. Joseph. My dear father's picture of St. Joseph is framed and placed in one of the parlours, which has taken its name from it. Reverend Mother says it is much admired. I hope it may do good in increasing devotion to that great Saint, and in suggesting to those who see it to say a prayer for a good death. It is a great blessing for my father to be able always to work so directly for the honour of God and of His saints ; for after all, my dear mamma, what is there worth living for if it is not to work for God, or to suffer for Him ? The other day we had a beautiful sermon on the words, "If any man will be my disciple, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me." The Reverend Father said, "Do you think if there had been a better way to get to heaven, that God would not have assigned it to His Blessed Mother ; but no—He gave her the cross—all her life was a cross, and she is ever the mother of sorrows." He told us also that renouncement was the only way to be happy—the only way to be good in this world, and that it is the especial portion of women to suffer and endure.

I think so much of you on Sundays now, since we have begun the novena. It seems as if we were united in our Saviour when I remember that we both have Him at the same time in our hearts.

I have been in the school since September as English teacher. The children are so good. I did not know that children ever were so good. It is quite a pleasure to be amongst them. Time passes very quickly. I can hardly believe another year has flown away. I hope God will grant me the grace during the next year to make my vows. Do pray for that, my dearest mamma. You know what a happiness it will be to me.

God is very merciful to all of us, though He sometimes sends us trials, and indeed, if we could look upon them rightly, trials are the greatest blessings, and it will be our best comfort at the hour of death to have suffered something for Jesus. When the remembrance of all our pleasures is past, our sufferings, with the

merits they have gained, will remain. Forgive me if I always speak of sufferings ; but I have been so used to see you in trouble that I can never fancy you free from them. It is a precious pledge of His love that our dear Lord has given us more or less all our lives. I trust we shall forget them all when we are one day reunited in heaven. Dearest mamma, let us strive to bear all, to pray always, and to take all our pains to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament.

Pray for me whilst I am in retreat. I have need of so many graces. I do so long to become a fervent religious, and to gain some souls to our dear Lord, to make up for those I have been the means of hindering. And pray also for our Reverend Mother-General. She is, as you know, very aged, and has had this year a number of trials. A few weeks ago one of the most ancient nuns died, two or three days ago another, and there is a third one very ill ; so that our dearmother sees all her first companions dying around her. She will soon be the only one left of the first generation of the Society.

I am sure you will unite your prayers with ours for a life so precious. I am always more and more happy in my vocation. Oh my dear mamma, I wish you had an opportunity of knowing a little more of our dear society. How different is the religious life from what they represent it in the world; what humility and what charity I see in all those around me; during all these years I have never heard, to my recollection, one uncharitable word—in a house of seventy persons. It is truly the heart of our dear Jesus which makes its loving influence felt in this manner. O that I may become a little less unworthy of so great a vocation.

It is now holiday-time, and we have only six or seven children with us now. One of their amusements is to go to the kitchen and make little cakes. They send in a plate of them to the community-room. They also catch fish in the lake, hoping each time to provide the whole house with a dinner; they have not, as you may suppose, yet succeeded. They are very dear children. One of the little ones said to me

yesterday, "Madame, when you go to communion, is not Jesus nearer to you than if your head was on His bosom?" and another often asks me, "When Jesus is in our hearts, does He speak to us?—will He answer me if I ask Him anything?" It is such a happiness to see these young hearts longing to receive our Lord. How glad He must be to come to them! O my dear mamma, can we ever praise Him enough for this great gift of the Blessed Sacrament? What should we do without it! Do you not feel that our trials are *nothing*, in comparison, now we are in the Church, because we have Jesus to go to. I often read that hymn of Father Faber's, "Jesus, my Lord, my God, my all, &c." I must bring this letter to a close. Once more I beg of you, my dearest mamma, to pray for me during my retreat, as I shall do for you all. Ask that I may have a true spirit of contrition, and a hatred of the least sin. O, please ask for me this of our Lady of Sorrows. Ma Mère said the other day that one of the reasons why we find it difficult to have a spirit of contrition is that we have not a true devotion to the Blessed Virgin,

and I really believe it is so. My own dearest mamma, good bye. It is so pleasant to talk with you, that although I began by telling you I had nothing to say, I have written quite a long letter.

We have here a nun, who made her noviciate with me, and who is to start to-morrow for America. This awakens again all my desires for the foreign missions, but I do not know if it will ever be the will of God that I should go. I should like to work a little for Him before I die, as I did so much against Him when I was a Protestant; but His will be done before all things. I was just thinking this morning that it has been His will that we should see very little of each other in this world. I remember the anguish of our partings when I was a child, and I asked Him with all my heart to accept the sacrifice we both make Him at present in order that we may be one day united before His throne. I hope you are well, and that Jesus consoles you in all your trials, for I doubt not you still have some. We can never find a

position without a cross. The great art is to learn to carry it bravely. It is a difficult lesson, but one learns it before the tabernacle, looking at Jesus, who has carried it before us. Do you not find it a consolation to think of the sorrows of Mary? I have taken the habit this last year of meditating on one of them for a quarter of an hour every day. I find it a source of many graces. Mary has suffered every sorrow. She can feel for us. Try to go to communion for me on the Feast of her Nativity, as I shall for you.

I shall be so glad, my dear papa, to see a print of the Death of St. Joseph. I have taken special interest in that picture, as much for its own sake as on your account. Mamma tells me you often speak of the little scenes we used formerly to have together. I often think of them too, and I thank our dear Jesus for all the patience you had with me. I can never sufficiently express to you my gratitude. I am sure you forgive me for all the many times I grieved you by my obstinacy. Pray for me very much that I may

overcome that great fault of my character. It is not very easy to become a humble child of the Church, after having been so long a stubborn heretic ; but all is possible to God.

I wish you all a very happy Easter time. It is four years to-day since I began to receive instructions from Father S——. How the time has flown. It is also just six months to-day since I made my vows. Pray for me that I may make more progress. I feel quite frightened when I think how life is passing. So many graces, so many communions, and so little fruit. Although I have been very happy in all these beautiful services, I do not forget the first time I attended them with you and dear Mr. L—— in our own little church. It was outwardly very poor, but we had Jesus with us, and we were happy. I was thinking yesterday that we can never be altogether unhappy when in the true Church ; for whatever misfortunes may happen to us, we have always the Blessed Sacrament and Holy Festivals to rejoice in. My dearest mamma, how often I recall your kindness to me,

who was so ungrateful. It is for the love of Jesus that we are separated. May our dear Lord accept the pain it gives us both in reparation for our sins, and reunite us after death for ever. Let us try to be generous, and rather die than commit the least wilful sin. I am very happy and engaged in the same way as when I last wrote. You ask me if I think I shall ever come to England. I do not know, dearest mamma, and I leave it in the hands of God. It is always possible in our order.

It has pleased our dear Lord to lead us through much tribulation; but He gives us at the same time so many graces. Let us thank Him more and more every day. During the services of Holy Week I could hardly do anything else, I feel so grateful that He has made us all Catholics. We now all have the true faith, and God has given us just the part He gave to His own Son, poverty, suffering, and Mary for our mother. Goodbye, my dearest mamma. If I listened to my own heart, I should write to you till to-morrow morning.

You need not think that it is your occupations which cause the distractions you complain of, for with no cares at all I am always distracted. We must bear this trial till it shall please our dear Jesus to take it away, and continue to pray all the same. Indeed it is a great grace that God suffers us in His Church, me at least. Often when I am before Him I wonder at His mercy in allowing such a sinner to remain before His tabernacle.

We have had a very great trial lately in the severe illness of one of our superiors. It is in these crosses that we see the charity and union which exist in this society. All the houses take part in the trial, and we are all like the children of one family. The pupils prayed also, as if it had been their own mother that was ill, and make a number of little sacrifices and acts of devotion. Another thing I must also tell you, because it shows how happy we are in the society. When our Reverend Mother Clementina was away, whom we love so much, the Superior who replaced her was exactly like her

in everything, so that the children used to say, "If we were to shut our eyes we should think it was Madame Clementina who was speaking to us." O my dear mamma, I am so glad to have entered the Sacred Heart. I find everything so perfect. Every day increases my happiness, How good God is to have placed me here in spite of so many difficulties. Do thank Him every day for me, and ask Him to make me a true child of His Sacred Heart.

I have thought of you a great deal during Lent, and followed you in spirit to the different churches where the expositions take place. I know you prayed for me, and I prayed for you, and thanked Almighty God that He has given me such parents. How I wish I could tell you all I feel when I look back to your goodness, and to the charity with which you worked for my conversion. Every day I live I appreciate more the blessing of being in the true Church. O that I were a worthy child of the Church, and not so undeserving of all the graces God gives me!

Remember me when you are at the feet of our good Master.

Have you heard of the Papal Zouave, through whose intercession miracles are obtained? He was a young man of about twenty years of age, a native of Nantes. He was in the seminary, and asked leave of the Bishop to go and fight for the Holy Father, promising to return after the troubles were over, but he was wounded and died. His body was brought back to Nantes, and several miracles have been wrought by his intercession.

We have been much edified by hearing of the piety of those good Zouaves. The Prelate who was here told us that they never complained, although the hardships they had to endure were terrible; marching from one o'clock in the morning, and sleeping only on the pavement of the churches, used for that purpose in time of war. Many of these young men were of good family, and used to all the comforts of life. The Father took occasion from this to speak to us of the strength God gives to those who work and suffer for Him.

My great consolation when I think of you is that you know the great value of the cross.

How I wish you would sometimes offer up your headaches to obtain that your daughter may become less headstrong.

I think so often of my little brothers and pray for them. I always ask that they may give themselves wholly to God. You know what I mean by this. It is a great thing to ask, but the heart of Jesus is so rich in graces.

On the eve of the Presentation one of the Fathers gave the children an instruction on the virtues the Blessed Virgin practised in the Temple. He spoke of her recollection and fervour in prayer, and said that when we pray with wilful distraction the angels will not offer our prayers to God, because it would be like presenting to a king a nosegay full of faded flowers, but he added that those who have distractions, but make efforts to resist them gain merit each time they do so. On the day of the

Presentation we had a clothing and a profession. I wish you could have heard the sermon on the happiness of the religious life. It would have cheered you; but however much the Father said, one felt it did not come up to the reality. It is such happiness to be in religion that it is quite impossible to describe it. We were much struck with the parents of the two new nuns. The father and mother of one of them were present with their eleven other children, and the father of the other, whose eldest daughter had died just eight days before he gave up his second child to God in such a generous manner.

Monday we had a holiday for the Feast of "Ma Mère," and we enjoyed it, I believe, full as much as the children. I know I did. A number of our ancient pupils came to spend the day here, and went to communion with us. We have great reason to thank the Sacred Heart of Jesus that our children continue so good in the world. We often hear of the good they do. Sometimes one of them evangelizes a whole village. The little girls of the poor

school came in with vases of red and white flowers in their hands, to offer their congratulation to our dear mother. I thought how your heart would have warmed towards one of these little ones, who has no parents. A boy of ten years of age takes care of all the family. The poor little girl is as wild as a savage; but when we give her anything nice to eat, she snatches it with her tiny hands and runs to give it to her brother.

Do not forget to pray for your child. You know the virtues she needs most, humility and obedience, and ask also that I may have the true spirit of my vocation. I need not say that I love our order as much as ever. It is like the Church; the more one knows it the more one appreciates the grace of belonging to it. O the comfort it is to think that we shall have a whole eternity in which to thank our dear Jesus for all His mercy, when we shall sing, "Blessed is the Lamb who has redeemed us." O my dearest mamma, let us ask Him every day with new fervour for grace to persevere to keep from sin,

and to love Him above all things. But how deeply one feels that it is impossible to do anything of one's self. May we receive new graces of humility at the crib, and when the dear little infant Jesus will come into our hearts at Christmas. I send my kind love to all and my kindest to you.

I shall never forget as long as I live what I owe you, my dear papa; for to you, under God, I am indebted for the greatest of all blessings, the true faith. I often think of the advice you gave me, especially with regard to the faults of my character, which still exist. Alas! I am still deficient in humility and docility. But every one is very patient with me here, and God is so good that I hope one day to become simple and childlike as all really good Catholics are—full of faith, like those good old women you used to teach me to admire.

I was so glad to hear that Louis had made his first communion, and prepared himself so well for it. Dear child, how I love him, and

Ally also. Every day at Mass I ask our Lord to call them to his special service. How nice it is to think now that on festival days the whole of our family can go to communion. I like to picture to myself my little brothers kneeling between my dearest papa and my dearest mamma. O what a happy moment, and I am at those times in spirit with you also, for it is the same Jesus who visits us. Is it not the greatest of all blessings to belong to the Church? One can never be quite unhappy, there is always the tabernacle to go to for consolation. I am every day happier, every day more grateful that God vouchsafed to call me to this vocation. If you could but see the charity, the obedience, the peace, which exists in our houses, you would indeed think that this life is heaven upon earth: It is such an immense happiness to serve God, or at any rate to do our best to try and serve Him. O pray for me, that I may be faithful to the many graces showered upon me.

It is a long time since I have heard from you. I fear dear G—— is worse. To have been in bed

for a whole month she must have been very ill. I ask our dear Lord to prepare her and you also, my dear mamma, for whatever may be His holy will. He knows what is best for us all, His ways seem hard sometimes, but we *know* they are for the best.

Yesterday three of our little pupils made their first communion. On each side of the form where they knelt before the altar were large nosegays of lilies. It was very pretty, and made one think of the purity with which He should be received "who feeds amongst the lilies."

I do not exactly know what my illness has been. I was examined at the beginning of it by a doctor, who said I believe that my lungs were not attacked. I am quite well at present, and my only trouble is that too much care of me is taken. You need not be at all anxious. My cough is gone away. I am quite well and strong. I wish my soul was half as well as my body.

I feel very much, my dearest mamma, all your trials. Indeed all your troubles are mine. I cannot help you, except by my prayers. I offer to our dear Lord the ardent desire I have to assist you, and as He knows that it is our love for Him which keeps us apart, I am sure He will give you more comfort than if I were with you. I am sure you must be wearied out, but do keep courage ; our dear Jesus keeps count of every step we take for Him, and he likes us to resemble His blessed mother in her sorrows. There is a pretty anecdote in the life of a holy solitary. He had a long way to go from his cave to fetch water, which tired him, and he resolved to build himself a little house near the spring ; but as he was thinking of this on his way to the well, he heard some one behind him counting one, two, three. He turned round and saw his guardian angel counting every step he took for the love of God. The solitary, on hearing this, removed still further from the spring, that he might increase the number of his steps.

I know how painful the distractions you speak of are. I often have them, and I say to Jesus, "My dear Jesus, my mind will go away from you, but I am determined that my body shall stay here, and I will remain like a poor beggar at the door of your tabernacle till you give me something." This is all we can do, but Jesus accepts it.

Since the last time I wrote we have had a great consolation. The perpetual adoration of the Blessed Sacrament has been established in this diocese. Last week it was our turn for the first time. We had exposition from midnight to midnight, and tried as much as we could to make reparation for the injuries our Blessed Lord receives. I do not think I have ever told you of the work we have here amongst the poor. There is a congregation of St. Ann for the married women. They meet every Sunday, and since it has been established there has been quite a change in the village, especially as regards order and cleanliness in the cottages. Then there is the congregation of the Children

of Mary for the young women, and a class of candidates for admission. Our elder pupils devote some of their leisure time on Sunday to teaching them the catechism, and little games too, with which they can amuse themselves at home.

I was so touched at your thinking of writing to me for the Feast of Corpus Christi. It is indeed a dear and memorable day for me. We are truly one in Jesus, as my dear papa said in one of his letters. I am more united with you all now so far away than I was at one time when under the same roof with you but not in the true faith. Let us pray that we may all have that true and simple faith which characterizes the real children of the Church.

We had a most interesting visit the other day from an American bishop. He told us of the faith of the people in his diocese, which is composed almost entirely of poor Irish. Many young girls come several miles every morning to hear mass. He also gave us the history of a

remarkable conversion. A Protestant woman, who had never seen or heard of Catholics, lost her son, a child of about four years of age. Shortly after his death she had a dream, in which it seemed to her as if she were in a forest, out which she could not find her way. Her little son then appeared and led her to a beautiful palace, the door of which was opened by a person dressed in a way she had never seen before. She paid little attention to this dream, till happening to go to Boston a short time afterwards, she looked, out of curiosity, into a Catholic church. To her surprise she recognised in the priest the very same person she had seen in her dream. After mass was ended, she went to the sacristy and related everything to him. She is now a fervent Catholic. God's ways are wonderful. Five years ago I had never entered a Catholic church, and *now* !

We had a holiday for Twelfth Night. Our children made living representations of holy pictures. I wished so my little brothers could have seen them. They were so pretty and

natural. A dear little Irish child represented the infant Jesus, holding a skein for the Blessed Virgin, whilst St. Joseph was planing wood close by. A woman was bringing her little child, who was naughty, to be blest by the divine infant. All our little pleasures here remind us of the mysteries of religion. It is so sweet to think of the holy family at Nazareth, and that after a little more suffering we may hope to be with our dear Lord. Let us pray for each other, that we may have courage to bear with patience the trials He sends us here, and strength to keep out of sin. It is difficult, but after all not for long.

I wish you could see our Reverend Mother. Her kindness and the care she takes of me would touch you very much. I am sure that it is owing to that care that I did not die last winter. This year I am much better, and bear the cold better than I expected. I have everything which the kindest mother could wish to procure for me. My only trial is to be so taken care of, because I always would desire to be

like the others ; but I know that to do the will of God and practise obedience is better than austerities, but it has been a hard lesson for me to learn : you know how attached I was to my own will on that point.

I have not forgotten dear —— in my communions during Lent. I trust our Blessed Lord has consoled you a little for his loss. But I must not speak of afflictions at this joyful time. On Easter Monday all should be happiness, and yet I need not reproach myself, for we should find our happiness in the cross. Our dear Saviour did not arrive at the joy of His resurrection without first living a most painful life and then dying a most painful death. And in our souls happiness follows close upon suffering. This is why I hope you are spending a happy Easter—happy through the peaceful joy which is found in living and suffering for Jesus. How good God has been to us ! I think there is nothing we could not endure now that we are all Catholics. We have nothing left to wish for now out of heaven ; but in the meantime let

us enjoy the blessing of belonging to His Church on earth.

If you have not seen it in the papers, you will be surprised to hear that we had about a week ago a visit from Queen Victoria. One morning at eight o'clock she sent us word that she should come at eleven, but requested that we should not mention it to any one. Accordingly we only told the children that a stranger from a distance was coming to see them. The queen came punctually, accompanied by the Duchess of Brabant and three other ladies. She was most amiable, visited all the house and the school, and admired the great cleanliness. She went into the Chapel, where the children were all assembled. We sung two hymns, one in honour of the Sacred Heart, and another, "Dieu seul" (God alone). After that she went to the orphans. It all seemed to pass very quickly. As I said before, she did not wish to be known, but the papers soon published it. May the impression have been a salutary one. This was our earnest desire as we saw her in the presence of our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. You may

think how much we prayed for her. She stayed an hour. Unfortunately it was so wet she could not see the grounds. I cannot describe what I felt when she walked through the noviciate, where some of us were at work.

When shall we be in heaven? my dearest mamma. I tremble and yet I hope. It seems to me very terrible to die, but yet it is what we must go through to see Jesus. Do ask Him every day, by the merits of His blessed Mother, to be with me in that great moment.

The Feast of our Reverend Mother is on the 23rd. You will not forget her on that day. If you knew how kind she is to me—how happy it would make you. Sometimes I can hardly help shedding tears, I am so touched at all the care she takes of me. She stopped one day on her way to church to see if I was warm enough. When it is cold she orders a fire to be lighted where I sleep. I tell you these little details that you may not be anxious about me, and that you may help me to thank the Sacred Heart of Jesus for all His goodness.

I am very glad that dear —— goes to the convent. I hope she will acquire there a solid piety. It is so necessary in these days. There is so much sentimentality in the world. People speak of confessors, sermons, churches, good works, &c., and make all their religion consist in that, instead of trying to overcome their bad habits and reform their characters. I am so happy that you have taken —— back. I am sure God will reward you, and even if there was no other reward, what a joy it is to do something for Jesus, and to be the means of saving a soul. As you say, dear —— is young in the faith, and there are many temptations at first in such a total change. It would indeed be a happiness if she became a religious, but we must also pray that she may not act lightly with regard to her vocation, as many converts do. The more I live the more I am convinced that there is not a greater misery than to enter into religion without sufficient consideration, and then return to the world. It is seldom that after that a person does much good. Let us pray then for our dear ——, that God may

guide her to choose, and then give her strength to go forward. It is such a solemn thing to contract engagements with Him. But my own dearest mamma, what a happiness it is to be for ever His. I can never tell you all the joy and peace it gives even in the midst of many imperfections. Every time you think of your Mary, thank our dear Jesus, and ask for her the *grace to persevere to the end.*

Before closing these extracts with Mary Fitzgerald's last letter to her mother, the two following ones should be given, as an additional proof of that tenderness of heart which religion deepened as well as hallowed in her heart up to the last moments of her life. The dear little brother to whom they were addressed has now joined her in Heaven. Her earnest desires for him have been fulfilled, not perhaps exactly in the way she looked to, but in the highest and most blessed manner. At the early age of

fifteen, with an unstained soul, and a piety which had gone on increasing from his earliest years, he departed this life, leaving behind him sweet memories and sacred hopes.

My own dear Ally,

I thought very much about you and dear Louis on Christmas day, and when I had our dear Jesus in my heart at the midnight mass, I asked Him to make you love Him very much, and that when you grow up, you may choose to serve Him all your life. I thought how happy you must be to go to communion with dear papa and mamma, and to receive the little infant Jesus in your heart. Is it not sweet, my dearest Ally, to tell Him how much we love Him, and to thank Him for becoming a little baby for the love of us. Let us try to keep our hearts always pure, for one little sin in us makes that dear Jesus suffer more than did all the cold and discomfort of the stable of Bethlehem. Mamma told me of the beautiful little crib you made. I like to fancy you and my dear little

Louis praying beside it, and do not forget your sister Mary. Ask the little Jesus to make her humble, obedient, and ready to suffer like Him. And now I must tell you a little story of what happened one Christmas night. A poor widow was putting her two little boys to bed, when a child with bare feet and rags came shivering to the door. They invited him in, and gave him an apple—the only food in the house. His appearance suddenly changed, and they saw that the poor little stranger was no other than the Divine Infant Himself. He said to them, “Persevere, my children, in your charity. Remember that when you feed the poor you feed Me. I must now depart, but I leave you my blessing.” He then made the sign of the cross over them and disappeared. But I see, my dearest brother, that my paper is nearly finished, so I must say good-bye. I hope soon to have a letter from you. Tell me all about yourself and Louis. What you do all day, and describe to me your pictures. Write to me just what you like. I shall be delighted with anything from my dearest Ally. Your own loving sister,—MARY.

My Dearest Ally,

I thank you very much indeed for your kind letter. I am so happy to hear that you were to make your first communion. Is it not a great grace that the Lord of heaven and earth should vouchsafe to come into the heart of a little boy. I am sure, my dear brother, that you must have been very happy, and that you thanked our dear Jesus very much. I have also thanked Him and prayed for you. I ask above all things that you may never lose the treasure you have received. Do you understand me? I mean that you may never commit a mortal sin. As long as you keep your heart pure, Jesus will stay in it. I am only repeating what our good Bishop told the children when he was here. He made them all promise never to commit a mortal sin, and to avoid venial ones as much as possible. Try to do this, my dearest Ally, and then you will often be allowed to receive our dear Lord. Have you read the life of St. Aloysius of Gonzaga? It is his feast to-day. You must ask

papa to let you read it. When Aloysius was only four years old, sometimes no one could find him, 'and when they had looked a long time, they would discover him in a hidden corner praying to God; and when he was a little older he would pray for hours in the church, with his hands joined, and his eyes fixed on the tabernacle. He made his first communion when he was about your age, and he soon became so holy that he was allowed to go to communion every week. My dearest Ally, try to imitate this saint; always say your prayers with great attention. Above all when you are in the church never look about you, and every day at mass thank the Lord Jesus for having come into your heart, and beg Him to make you good and to come soon again to you. I should have liked very much to have written to you for Thursday, but I did not get your letter in time. Will you accept this picture? I do love you and Louis so much, and I hope we shall all three meet in heaven. Pray for me that I may be a holy nun. I hope you will write often now you have begun. I hope to write to you soon again. In

the mean time accept the kindest love of your own devoted sister,

MARY MAGDALEN,
Religious of the Sacred Heart.
Feast of St. Aloysius, of Gonzaga.

Thursday, February, 1865.

S. C. J. M.

My own dearest Mamma,

I have not heard from you for such a long time that I am afraid you are in some trouble. Alas! that I should be obliged to add to your sorrows. God's will be done! Reverend mother has asked me to write and tell you that I am very unwell, and confined altogether to the Infirmary. Forgive me if I have never told you, my dearest mamma, that I was in a consumption. I was afraid of giving you pain. The last colds I have had, ended by breaking me up altogether. Do not, my own dearest mamma, be too unhappy. I need not beg you to pray for me that I may have a good death. Still I beseech you to ask this grace for me through St.

Joseph. Do not regret that I am not near you. Let us make the sacrifice generously. After all, God's will before all. How can I tell you all the kindness lavished on me here? It would be impossible. I have everything, and more than everything necessary, and every one is kind to me. Give my kindest love to my dear little Ally and my dear little Louis; with this little sentence :—" If the soul is lost," all is lost, and I put myself at the feet, my dear mamma, of you and my dear papa, and I beg you to forgive me all the many times I have offended you by my bad and wicked conduct, by my passions and disobedience. I thank you for all your great kindness; above all, in allowing me to enter into religion, where I am so happy. Bless, I beg you, my dear papa and mamma, your submissive and loving child,

MARY MAGDALEN, R.S.C.

We conclude this little biography with the following lines from the pen of one of Mary Fitzgerald's Sisters in Religion:—

“Mary Magdalen Fitzgerald spent the whole of her religious life in the Convent of the Sacred Heart, at Gettes St. Pierre, near Brussels, where her memory is held in affectionate and edifying remembrance. It may well be said of her, that she hungered and thirsted after righteousness. Her devoted love, her profound respect for everything connected with God and religion was evinced at all times and under all circumstances. She had no greater pleasure than to spend in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament every moment of time which religious obedience left at her disposal. There was in her fervent piety something severe and self-exacting, which we often notice in recent converts ; and this disposition sometimes turned her ardent desire to please God and to advance in perfection into a torment. She bitterly reproached herself for the slightest failings, and though very charitable and indulgent towards others, she

judged her own actions with relentless rigour. Often fancied there was sin where not a shade of it existed, and could never learn to apply to her own soul the indulgent measures which regulated her conduct towards others.

“When Madame Fitzgerald entered the Society of the Sacred Heart she was already suffering from incipient consumption. During several years she endured with heroic patience continual sufferings and a most painful state of debility; but her faith was so intense that it seemed to electrify her weak frame. It gave her the appearance of being strong, and work seemed to refresh instead of wearying her. Whilst every one else was wondering at her energy, she would groan over her want of courage, as if it had not been her courage alone which enabled her to devote herself as she did to the instruction of the children to whom she taught English. She had quite an extraordinary talent for imparting instruction, her method being at once clear and attractive. It was only about a fortnight before her death that our dear Sister was compelled to give up an employment

which her failing strength no longer permitted her to carry on.

“During those last weeks of her life a visible and wonderful increase of love for our Lord was evinced in that holy soul. She feared death and had a vivid apprehension of God’s judgments, and this made her repeatedly request the prayers of the Community for the closing hour of her life. These prayers were doubtless heard, for, a little while before her end, a great weakness, and occasional wandering of mind, seemed to veil from her the near approach of death, without however depriving her in the least degree of the power of making fervent and constant acts of the love of God, to whom she kept continually offering up her sufferings and her life. In the midst of her last agony she received, which had always been her desire, a last absolution, and then fell quietly asleep in the arms of her Lord, on the 26th of February, 1865. Her death was indeed the death of the Just! After receiving the last Sacraments, our holy Sister had begun a letter, in which she wished to express to our very Reverend Mother-

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General her gratitude and joy at dying a member of the Society of the Sacred Heart. These touching lines were found amongst her papers. We see her accusing herself of having impeded the work of God by her want of generosity, and declaring that she had deserved to be *expelled* from the Society! This was indeed the way in which she used always to speak, and to think of herself."

We give that unfinished letter:—

My very Reverend Mother,

Yesterday I had the happiness to receive the last Sacraments. Under these circumstances I feel constrained to write and thank you for your great goodness in admitting me into the Society of the Sacred Heart, notwithstanding so many reasons against it. I thank you also, with all my heart, for having kept me when I so often deserved to be expelled. I humbly beg your pardon, my Venerated Mother, for all the faults and miseries I have been guilty of, and for impeding, instead of promoting, the work of God by my obstinate adherence to my own will. I implore you, my Mother, to forgive me

for the love of Jesus Christ, and to bestow your maternal benediction on the most unworthy of your daughters. My very Reverend Mother, I can never forget your goodness at the time of my

* * *

Here the pen fell from the hand of the dying Child of the Sacred Heart. Her last words need no comment.

Those who have watched the good which persons in the position of Elizabeth Twiddy, Mary Fitzgerald, and many others who are even now quietly labouring amongst the poor in various parts of London, effect, must often be struck with the usefulness of these sort of ministrations; and, at the same time, with the inevitable uncertainty which attends their continuance in any particular locality. All secular work of this kind is necessarily subject to constant interruptions and changes. Often,

at the very moment when it is beginning to establish satisfactory results, and to tell beneficially on a poor neighbourhood, family reasons, other duties, sometimes a mere change of abode, puts an end to what seemed so promising, and at once removes from the scene of her labours the person on whom everything depended. Another high and holy reason often will account for these sudden endings of hopeful beginnings. Those who love the poor out of love for our Blessed Lord, and divide all their leisure time between works of mercy and prayer, are often led to desire a more entire consecration to God and surrender of worldly ties. Religious vocations will spring up by the bedside of the sick, or amidst efforts to win back souls to God, or during ardent prayers for conversions; and, according to the various inspirations of grace, the resolution to become a Sister of Cha-

rity or of Mercy, a Nun of the Good Shepherd, a little Sister of the Poor, or a Poor Clare, withdraws from the world! the devoted girl whom God thus rewards for her good works. And God forbid we should regret this tendency, or depreciate what is the strength and glory of the Church; the substitution of solid good for temporary advantages—self-sacrifice perfecting pious impulses, and producing those wonderful results, which nothing but religious orders can obtain. But whilst we feel this as deeply and strongly as possible, does not the thought occur that the present condition of our Poor, and the special difficulties Catholicism has to contend with in London, call for something we do not possess? that there exists a want which no religious order amongst us quite meets as yet? Are not religious workers needed in every parish, and yet how is it possible, with our

scanty resources and the numerous calls upon them, to erect a Convent, or establish a House of Charity in each poor locality? And, furthermore, inestimable as are the blessings conferred by the ministrations of Sisters of Charity and of Mercy, is there not a work to be done which the very nature of their orders cannot admit of?—that peculiar work which can only be effected by those who associate with the poor, labour with them, in a certain sense live with them, and exercise the daily influence of example in a mode of existence similar to their own.

The idea of such a life as this, sanctified by a special consecration, and regulated by a holy rule, was conceived about eighteen years ago in Poland. There deep poverty and tyrannical restrictions made it impossible to multiply religious houses, and yet the faith of the peasantry was in danger of

being subverted by the efforts of a schismatic Government, and the ignorance in which the Catholic children in country villages were left, and a zealous lover of the Church and his country bethought himself of proposing to a few pious girls—the daughters of farmers and peasants—to devote themselves to the work he had in view. Out of this simple plan, arose what is now a recognized congregation approved at Rome—the Institute of the Little Servants of the Most Holy Mother of God. He placed three young women, who had spent some time in a house of Sisters of Charity for the purpose of being trained in the Spirit of the Religious life, in a cottage on his estate, the garden of which was to be their chief means of support. One of them, sufficiently instructed for that object was to gather together the children of the place, and teach them to read and write, and,

above all, the Catechism. The other two, by cultivating the garden, or working in the fields like the other women of the village, were to earn the livelihood of the little community. They had thus often the opportunity of instructing those amongst whom they laboured. Their dress was that of the peasants, their manner of life similar to theirs. They had no chapel of their own; only a little oratory, or an altar, in the school-room, before which their prayers were said, in which, especially at night, they invited the women living near them to join. They went to the Parish Church for Mass.

This first attempt succeeded so well that other establishments of the kind were soon made. A general rule was given them by the Ecclesiastical authorities. A Mother house was founded at Posen; they rapidly increased in numbers, and extended to Germany and Galicia.

Why should there not be Little Servants of the Most Holy Mother of God in London? Instead of a cottage, a floor with three rooms in a house, the rest of which might be let to respectable poor people. Instead of a garden, some employment provided, which, with a small amount of assistance, could support a little community of three persons, who would devote their evenings, at least, and the spare hours on Sunday, to teaching, visiting, consoling, and helping in various ways their poor neighbours. Where a school-mistress was wanted, one of them might be employed in that way. If a little orphanage was started, another might take charge of it; babies might be taken care of whilst their parents were at work; girls assembled together of an evening for instruction. During the years which preceded Elizabeth Twiddy's death, a specimen might have been seen in

the Ingestree Buildings of what such a little community would effect. Those who have read the short biography of that holy girl will at once perceive how exactly her life and that of her friends indicated the sort of Institute we have endeavoured to describe. One of the associates took care, at home, of a few little orphans and worked with her needle to support them. Another, Elizabeth herself, the young cap-maker, carried on an apostolate among poor girls; a third worked and collected pence for the maintenance of the little family. Why should not this mode of life be sanctified, organized, and perpetuated under the name and the rule, and perhaps in connexion with the Institute of the Little Servants abroad?

There may be many poor girls whose hearts are burning with love of God and zeal for souls, whom such a vocation might

• suit. Some who long to give themselves up entirely to the service of God and of the poor, but have not strength perhaps to become Lay Sisters in religious houses, or means and education sufficient to enter otherwise into a religious order. Would it not be to them a blessed thought to transform their life of ordinary labour into a religious vocation, and to bind themselves for a while by vows (the Little Servants make theirs for three years) to the service of God and the poor? It would not necessarily follow that in all cases the care of children, or any definite work of charity should be adopted by these little communities. To work for their own support; to give those about them the example of a virtuous and holy life; to bear constantly in view the glory of God and the salvation of souls, and to keep exactly their rule, might in many instances sufficiently fulfil their vo-

cation. It might, on the other hand, sometimes happen that means of support would be furnished them, which would enable one or more of the Sisters to devote her whole time to the care of the sick, the visiting of the poor, or the teaching of children.

If any one in reading these pages should find that the suggestions they contain meet some long-cherished and undefined wish; if any priest, unable to establish a Convent or House of Charity in his parish, and yet desiring to have religious working amongst his poor, should approve of them, we would ask them to pray that what at present is only a hope—a hope, however, which has received a high sanction, may soon become a reality. Whilst describing Mary Fitzgerald's zeal for souls, and the good she did during the few months she worked in London, the idea of this Insti-

tute kept continually rising before us, and these pages are annexed to her life in the hope that some of those who may read it will take an interest in promoting its establishment amongst us.



